DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 035 SP 038 316

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TITLE Teacher Interns' Changing Perceptions during Internship.
PUB DATE 1998-11-04
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1998)
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; Attitude Measures; Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; Language Arts; Preservice Teacher Education; Reflective Teaching; *Student Teacher Attitudes; Student Teachers

ABSTRACT

This study described the internship of two English language arts interns, examining how their perceptions evolved during the 4.5-month, senior-year internship. The study investigated how the internship affected their perceptions of and beliefs about (1) themselves as teachers, (2) teacher professionalism, (3) their effectiveness as change agents, and (4) opportunities for practicing effective strategies and pedagogical skills. The study examined the impact of the school climate and classroom environment on interns' perceptions of teaching and effective practice, preconceived beliefs about the internship experience versus the actual experience, effect of cooperating teachers on the internship program, and opportunities to practice effective strategies and pedagogical skills. Data collection included extensive interviews, document analysis, field notes, interns' reflective daily journals, and classroom observations. Results indicated that school climate and classroom atmosphere significantly impacted interns' perceptions of effective teaching. Both interns had difficulty with relaxed attitudes toward discipline and classroom management. Interns' preconceived beliefs about the internship experience were in contrast to the actual experience. Cooperating teachers had a great impact on interns' becoming reflective practitioners and on their perceptions of best classroom practice. Interns were frustrated and confused by a perceived lack of commitment by cooperating teachers to help them define and polish problematic areas. Opportunities for practicing effective strategies and learning pedagogical skills were limited. (Contains 28 references.) (SM)

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ED 428 035

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Paper presented at The Mid-South Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA
November 4, 1998

SP038316

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Teacher Interns' Changing Perceptions During Internship

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in the 1980s there were numerous recommendations for reform in teacher education. It has been well documented by research that the internship is the pivotal point in students' learning to teach. There has been little research to date on how to make this the best possible experience for those who want to become exemplary teachers, and how it alters their views about the teaching profession and their practices in the classroom.

This study was conducted to describe the internship of two English language arts interns and how that experience affected their perceptions and beliefs of (a) themselves as teachers, (b) professionalism of teachers, (c) their effectiveness as an agent for change, and (d) opportunities for practicing effective strategies and pedagogical skills. This phenomenological case study employed qualitative methods and involved extensive interviews, document analysis, field notes, and participant observations.

After analysis of the data, the findings of this study indicated the following:

1. The school climate and classroom atmosphere had a large impact on interns' perceptions of effective teaching.
2. Interns' preconceived beliefs about the internship experience were in contrast to the actual experience.
3. The cooperating teacher had a great impact on interns' becoming reflective practitioners and their perceptions of best classroom practice.
4. Opportunities for practicing effective strategies and learning pedagogical skills were limited.

Introduction

The teaching internship often brings a clearer picture of what teaching is about for teacher interns. They are initiated into the teaching profession by that classroom experience and often, the ideas, beliefs, and perceptions they held in the beginning of the internship gives way to new and different ideas as they learn to teach in the real world of school. The picture they see in the end is many times different from the one they see in the beginning. Goodlad (1990) found that interns believed that their internship and field experiences had a far greater impact on their learning to teach than any college coursework that they completed.

Furthermore, many interns believed that their internship provided the only real learning experience from their teacher education program. This was emphasized by Britzman (1991) who concluded that the myth of experience "valorizes student teaching as the authentic moment in teacher education and the real ground of knowledge production" (p. 7). The commonly held belief of researchers in the last 2 decades is that there exists an overwhelming relationship in the quantity of school experience and the amount of learning to teach - - - the more experience an intern has in the classroom, the more he/she learns about teaching.

Few have disagreed with Zeichner (1986) that the practicum has been a "significant occasion for acquiring new knowledge, skills and dispositions" (p. 12), but he reported that there was surprisingly little information about how the experience contributed to the process of learning to teach. Russell (1991) concurred that there had been the acceptance of the value of all school experience on almost a blind faith. There was a need in much of the research reported to conceptualize how those experiences contributed to interns learning to teach and to their transition to classroom teacher from student in the end of the placement.

Before the internship, many interns held overly inflated beliefs about their effectiveness in teaching, classroom management, daily routines of the school and coping mechanisms for daily stress that they faced as educators (Veenman, 1984). As they acquired classroom experiences through their internship, they often changed their beliefs. For some, self-efficacy declined, and they held very different views concerning teaching and coping abilities. Goodlad (1990) reported that in some cases, what was learned in the internship could be detrimental to their role as a future educator, and could discourage interns from continuing in their educational career. In extreme cases, interns dropped out of the internship before completion.

Review of the Literature

The review of the literature focused on the issues pertinent to the internship and the successful preparation of interns for the journey to classroom teacher: the need of improvement and reform in teacher education and the internship, features of successful programs of teacher preparation, reasons for unsatisfactory internships, and influential factors during the internship such as (a) school atmosphere, (b) cooperating teachers and college supervisors, (c) theory to practice in the classroom, and (d) stress and its effect on interns' perceptions of and actual teaching effectiveness.

For the past 30 years, researchers directed their study toward understanding the learning and teaching processes by acknowledging the perspectives of the participants in teaching internships. Teaching internships and the schools in which they took place were described as complex, multidimensional and unpredictable, and composed of unstable and unique events replete with value conflict (Goodlad, 1990; Schon, 1987). For interns, this already complex work situation was further complicated by the teacher education/preparation role in which they operated.

Further, being a student while being a teacher was a role that was not often researched or investigated in the field experience. Most studies focused specifically on either beginning teachers, or student teachers with little attention given to the transfer and use of university learned components and transfer of those to the classroom. Several researchers felt the need for additional studies on the total professional development of interns prior to and beyond the internship period (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

The available research was rich with information concerning the need for improvement in teacher education, and especially in the areas of the internship and field experiences. Goodlad (1990) stressed the importance of interns having high quality experiences in their internship. In order to see improvement and reform in education of teachers, schools of education had to carefully design and monitor the internship experience for all students. Typically, the internship was a place and time where the intern had to build relationships and interact closely with the cooperating teacher, the students, and the college supervisor. The relationship between the intern and the cooperating teacher had a profound effect on the internship success (Gold & Bachelor, 1988).

Additionally, Chicon and Koff (1980) stated that if there were a poor relationship and conflict between the participants, then motivation and opportunities to learn were reduced. It was imperative that the interns, supervisors, and the cooperating teachers build and maintain a positive working relationship. Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik (1990) identified five features that were present in colleges of education that integrated elements of a program successfully: (a) preservice teacher education is the major focus of the program, (b) every faculty member is involved in the program, (c) faculty remain in proximity to one another, (d) faculty

communicates daily and discuss current educational issues, and (e) the number of teachers produced annually is small.

Goodlad, Soder and Sirotnik (1990) stressed the importance of improving internship and field experiences and of giving interns more opportunities to teach in the classroom. Interns who were left to use observational/teaching strategies at their own discretion had aimless experiences. They needed structure and guidance with constant feedback from both the cooperating teacher and the supervisor from the university. McDermott, Gormley, Rothenberg, and Hammer (1995) stated that the improvement of the internship was imperative for helping the interns to grow in pedagogical skills from varied experiences and constructive feedback.

Similarly, Meade (1991) further suggested that the cooperating teachers had a huge effect on the internship experience. Some were not trained in supervision; others volunteered, or were assigned by administrators for convenience. Many times, supervisors from the university were not interested in teacher intern supervision, were overloaded with other responsibilities, or received little or no recognition for their work. Much of the supervisory responsibilities fell to adjunct professors or to graduate students with little or no training in supervision. These were all factors that could adversely affect the experience for interns.

Interestingly, Wise (1991) declared that some supervising teachers were not learned in the newer methods of pedagogy such as student-centered learning, diversity in the classroom, and constructivist classroom learning. Closing this chasm of theory from the college classroom to what was demonstrated by the classroom teachers was one of the most challenging problems that colleges of education faced (Goodlad, 1990). When these problems occured, the interns tended to incorporate those methods they observed with little reflection about why they worked, or the possible alternatives.

This often kept them from reflective growth or from establishing a good foundation for future learning and change. In addition, the cooperating teacher's ability and/or unwillingness to reflect on his or her own and the interns' classroom teaching resulted in inadequate feedback being given to interns. That lack of quality resulted in high stress, confusion and frustration for the interns. In classrooms where cooperating teachers were reflective and gave ample feedback, interns were highly successful and felt confident in their teaching. In classrooms where they did not receive feedback, they were helpless to understand and determine how the cooperating teacher perceived their classroom practices (Zeichner, 1992).

The lack of feedback and other issues that caused stress for interns in the internship were prevalent in the literature. For nearly 5 decades the focus had been on the problems that occurred in the internship and early years of teaching related to stress (Johnston & Ryan, 1983). Frequently cited problems that induced stress included (a) discipline, (b) isolation, (c) evaluation, (d) grading student work/grades, and (e) selection of appropriate methods and materials (Lortie, 1975; Ryan, 1986, Veenman, 1984). This was a problem that researchers felt needed to be addressed and further studies made to address how to lower the extremely high stress on these teachers. Their conclusions were that the strain and stress during the internship and early teaching years let to fatigue, depression, and the exit of many teachers from the profession. Vonk (1995) added research that examined stress reduction through support from networks of intern teachers within schools. It seemed that the stress was lower for groups of interns within schools than for those in a single placement.

Goodlad (1990) stated that the interns needed to be exposed to the whole school in order to see the picture of school problems, and to understand how they as teachers could help solve those problems for the students, school, and the community. The nature of the interns'

professional development was a function of the interaction between person-related and environment-related factors. This process was not separated from the environment in which it took place. Since the internship marked the beginning of the professional career and development, it was also the time when they began creating their own professional identities (Britzman, 1991).

Similarly, curriculum theorists (Berliner, 1985; Giroux, 1988; Goodlad, 1990) emphasized the importance of engaging interns in real world tasks. Engaging interns in the process of the pedagogy as they acquired or demonstrated knowledge in the academic subject matter was a powerful pedagogical strategy for supervisors and cooperating teachers. This view of the curriculum and pedagogy in the internship recognized the value of the individual intern in the social context of the internship and within the school itself.

Another barrier to a successful internship for many interns was their lack of skills to deal with today's intercultural, interracial, and diverse needs and abilities grouped classrooms. Zeichner (1992) reported that most teacher education students were not from widely diverse socioeconomic, cultural, or racial backgrounds. Additionally, many colleges of education did not adequately prepare interns to teach in these economically and culturally diverse classroom situations. As a result, many interns lacked the strategies and problem-solving abilities to deal with the diverse problems acquainted with the diversity in the classroom.

Interns have experienced great difficulty in changing their attitudes and teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse student populations, even after the exposure to the literature and a multicultural workshop on culturally diverse learners (McDiarmid & Price, 1993). It appeared that if worthwhile change were to occur in teaching practices, interns must have (a) the opportunity to reflect on what they know and value in traditional teaching, (b) practical

experiences in different school populations, points of view, or cultures, and (c) theory and research to guide their curricular innovations (Richardson, 1990). The internship needed to provide the opportunities for teaching dilemmas in cooperative learning groups comprised of the students from "at risk" as well as diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. This connection to the real world of teaching provided interns with opportunities beyond the classroom at college to the field placement experiences to carefully reflect and critically analyze teaching incidents to develop schemas appropriate for their own future practice in the classroom (Henson 1988).

In summary, the literature provided overwhelming evidence for needed improvement in teacher education and the quality of the internship. Several contributing factors greatly affected interns' perceptions of a high or low quality internship experience: (a) placement with the cooperating teacher, (b) college supervisor involvement, (c) single classroom placement/preparedness for diversity in the student population, (d) poor feedback and supervision, and (e) school and classroom atmosphere.

Methodology

This phenomenological case study used the qualitative paradigm to describe the experiences during internship of two English language arts interns, and how their perceptions evolved during the 4.5-month internship of their senior year. As reported by Lincoln and Guba (1985), there were three key points that guided this naturalistic approach to understand the human experiences and to construct reality and truth from those experiences: (a) researcher and participants construct their own meaning, (b) the epistemological foundation is based on values and value judgements, and truth is socially negotiated, and (c) because of grounded theory and triangulation, the research is empirical. Because the study documented the changing

perceptions, beliefs and actions of interns throughout the internship, the study chronicled the process of their development as teachers.

Data was collected from January 8, 1998 through May 10, 1998 from various sources: (a) structured interviews that were taped and transcribed, (b) observations in the classroom, (c) field notes of the researcher, (d) reflective daily journals of interns, and (e) document analysis. Following the collection of the data, the interviews were transcribed, unitized, coded, analyzed, and then collapsed into emergent themes. After individual case study analysis, the themes were examined, and the overall results were reviewed to ensure the study depicted meaningful relationships to describe the meaning of the internship to the participants. Triangulation is a check for reliability, validity and credibility of data by comparison of one set of data to another. The data were triangulated and coded from one set to the other for fit. In addition, participants were given transcribed interviews to review and make changes or comments as felt necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the internship of two English language arts interns and how that experience affected their perceptions and beliefs of (a) themselves as teachers, (b) professionalism of teachers in the internship, (c) their effectiveness as teacher agents for change, and (d) opportunities for practicing effective strategies and pedagogical skills.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

1. *What impact do the school climate and classroom atmosphere have on teacher interns' perceptions of teaching and effective practice?* Both interns had difficulty with the relaxed attitude concerning discipline and classroom management. They felt that the discipline problems and the failure of the administration to support teachers in discipline problems greatly reduced their effectiveness in the classroom. While this was a school-wide problem,

and outside their control, it certainly adversely affected the interns' teaching and their perceptions of a positive and safe learning environment supporting Vonk's (1995) research on school culture. Second, what they perceived as a lack of teamwork within the department was in contrast to what they expected to find in the school. There was an attitude of negativity in the teaching philosophies of the cooperating teachers as well as other faculty. The daily exposure to negativity, apathy and indifference shattered their enthusiasm and feelings of professionalism. This category supported the research concerning the multidimensional, complex, unpredictable, and value-conflicted arenas of schools in which internships take place (Goodlad, 1990; Schon, 1987). Third, the problems associated with a diverse school population impacted the interns. They were surprised and shocked to learn not only of the apathy and low motivation of the students, but also of the low expectations the teachers held for the students. The interns worked to instill a sense of self-efficacy in the students as they realized they were responsible for teaching those students. They became involved in their students' academic and extracurricular endeavors devoting hours of extra time that were not required of them. This change in their perceptions of seeing the internship from a "self" to a "student" centered event supported the research which studied the transition of interns from thinking of themselves as a student to seeing themselves as the teacher responsible for the students' success (Gess-Newsome & Lederman, 1990; Reeves & Kaselkis, 1985).

2. *How do interns' preconceived beliefs concerning the internship experience compare and or contrast to the experience of the internship and the teaching profession?* As suggested by the research, the interns had constructed a prior image of a teacher by internalizing the hours spent in classrooms with teachers who had influenced them (Lortie, 1975; Zeichner, 1992).

They felt that they were well-prepared by the university classes, practicum hours required by each education course, and especially felt confident and prepared to teach by the methods block course they had completed. One intern was placed in the school for the first time as she began the internship, and she felt that an earlier placement with more orientation and preparation would have been helpful. The other intern had been in the school for the previous semester as she completed the methods block, and she found that the year-long placement was very beneficial. This supported the research by Goodlad (1990) and Gold and Bachelor (1988) who said that a year-long placement allowed interns to have a more meaningful and successful internship. They reported that there was difficulty in adjusting to the lack of camaraderie they had experienced in the university setting, but did not find within the school. It was reported in the research that ideally, the same perceptions and pedagogy exhibited by the methods block course and other university classes persist throughout the internship; however, for these interns, those feelings and connections did not continue. There were differences in the demands made on the interns' time in the classroom teaching. The intern who was newly placed in the school was given total responsibility for teaching all classes every day from the third day of placement. The other intern taught after 2 weeks of observation and was responsible for four classes each day. The realities of the internship were difficult to anticipate, and the experience was analogous for them of "being thrown into a deep pool and drowning." This total immersion of an intern into a classroom situation may create more poor habits in the form of survival skills than effective instructional skills and strategies. As Ryan (1986) summarized in his research, the problems of the overburdened intern often led to fatigue, depression, and exit from the program for many interns. Indeed, one intern in this study seriously considered leaving the program because of the induced stress and overworked situation. They were unprepared for the long hours, paperwork,

classroom routing, and the preparation for teaching. Their other practicum experiences had not given them a true picture of what it meant to be in the classroom every day or to be responsible for students' learning. They were told by faculty that they were idealistic, and many times, they found it difficult to remain true to the values and ideals they had concerning their role and place as educators. One intern was told by a faculty member in the school, "Get out of education!" This was not what she expected to hear from a veteran teacher as she began her career. The students they taught were the single most impacting factor that changed their perceptions because they did not expect to become close to the students they taught. They agreed that the relationship to their students was the most positive and rewarding part of their internship. This finding supported the study by Fuller (1969) which provided the theoretical conceptualization of how interns became teachers through coping with student interaction.

3. *How do the interaction and influence of the cooperating teacher affect the internship experience and the interns' perceptions of the best practice in teaching?* The interns were quick to say that they liked their cooperating teachers as people, but they were frustrated and confused by what they perceived as a lack of commitment on the teachers' part to help them define and polish problematic areas in their teaching. The cooperating teachers did not complete timely observations and evaluations of the interns, and they were relaxed in giving reflections or feedback. Part of this problem could have been attributable to the fact that they were already stressed in adjusting their own teaching practices to meet the needs of challenging students in inclusive classrooms. This finding supported the research that said cooperating teachers were not always competent in supervision, nor had they received supervision training (Goodlad, 1990; Zeichner, 1992). Mc Dermott, Gormley, Rothenberg, and Hammer (1995) found that the quality of the internship was higher and the interns grew in pedagogical skills when they had

constructive feedback and reflective teaching was modeled by the cooperating teachers. When the interns did not receive adequate feedback, the internship was less satisfactory on all levels. One of the most disappointing outcomes from the study concerning the cooperating teacher was the issue of professionalism. One intern was traumatized early in the placement by her teacher telling her that she had laughed about her philosophy of education on her application for internship, and that she had shared the joke with other faculty members. The interns felt that this and other negative comments made by their cooperating teachers concerning the other faculty members, students, and administration were very unprofessional. Vonk (1995) reported that it was imperative that the professionalism developed by the cooperating teacher be transferred to the intern by modeling in an interaction between person-related and environment-related factors. This internship experience was the beginning of them creating their own professional identities, and they did not get the best role models from their own assessment.

4. What are the opportunities to practice effective strategies and to learn pedagogical skills? The interns brought with them into the internship their knowledge in the content area, instruction in beliefs and best practice for students, and the overall pedagogical skills in decision making and reflection they had learned at the university. For both interns, the opportunities were provided by the cooperating teachers to practice and apply theoretical perspectives in the classroom setting. They were encouraged to draw form and knowledge base of content, pedagogy, and technology to provide relevant and meaningful experiences for their students. The cooperating teachers made available to them their files of worksheets, handouts, and other materials, but the interns often perceived this to be a shortcut and a shortchange to the students. They wanted to make "good stuff like at the university," but found that the time needed was unavailable to them because of their work schedule and other responsibilities. They were critical

of the teachers for relying on the tried and true. These less than ideal experiences, such as relying on the text books or worksheets could be seen as scaffolds from which to learn how to undertake the more complex tasks of teaching. While the interns dismissed the experiences as not providing them a learning experience, it allowed them to have ready materials at hand while they mastered more important tasks in the teaching experience. While they felt prepared and competent to teach writing, poetry, literature and other content areas, they felt uncomfortable when teaching grammar. They reflected that they had needed more preparation in the grammar and how to teach it to students. Another theme that arose in the area of pedagogical skills was their perceptions of their inability to plan for and address their teaching to the student individual needs and cultural differences. They struggled to meet the academic and emotional needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms. This supported the research that said interns were ill prepared to deal with today's intercultural, interracial, and diverse needs and abilities grouped classroom (Zeichner, 1992; Good, 1990). They lacked the strategies and problem-solving abilities to deal with the diverse problems acquainted with the classroom populations they found.

Conclusions and Implications

1. The perceptions of the interns concerning the negative atmosphere in the classroom and school should be treated as problematic and suggested a need to determine how teacher educators might work with interns to change those perceptions. The time which interns spend in the classroom is too limited for potentially valuable experiences to be wasted in terms of their contribution to the learning process.
2. The participants indicated a breakdown in the observation, evaluation and feedback from their cooperating teacher. Teacher education programs need to examine the inadequate motivations of those who supervise in the classrooms, and to provide training and continuing

education with those teachers. If there are problems with any area of supervision, there needs to be swift intervention to remedy the situation, and/or removal of the intern from that classroom.

3. Because of the interns' perceived lack of good modeling of teaching skills and professional behavior by the cooperating teachers in this study, it would be beneficial to include some training to them to incorporate the professional behavior and teaching skills interns need to learn in a placement. Additionally, there needs to be ongoing evaluations of those teachers and supervisors involved with interns in the program.
4. The interns in the study expressed the perceptions of being ill prepared to deal with the diversity of the students in the classroom concerning their learning styles, socioeconomic, interracial, cultural and learning abilities. This suggested an implication for Colleges of Education to build additional curriculum that would better prepare interns and teachers for meeting that challenge in the future.
5. Last, there was the interns' and the cooperating teachers' perception that the interns needed additional preparation in grammar from the university. There needs to be a fusion between the College of Arts and Science and College of Education to ensure that the additional course requirements are written in the curriculum to cover this deficiency in content preparation. With the current reform in education and demands for higher scores on competency tests for classroom students in all schools, teaching grammar is an area of concern that must be addressed and remedied.

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